

UK teacher draws raves for Appalachian book

After spending a year watching Lost Mountain change from a dense, glorious ecosystem to barren land, Erik Reece's soul was stirred to respond to the loss with his first book, *Lost Mountain: A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness, Radical Strip Mining and the Devastation of Appalachia*.

Reece, a University of Kentucky English lecturer, is known for his powerful essays on political topics such as strip mining and religion. In *Lost Mountain*, Reece observes the systematic obliteration of a peak in the middle of what scientists regard as the North American rainforest because of its remarkable density and diversity of plants, birds and animals. The mountain was situated in eastern Kentucky.

"To know about strip mining or mountaintop removal is like knowing about the nuclear bomb. It is to know beyond doubt that some human beings have, and are willing to use, the power of absolute destruction," writes Wendell Berry in the foreword. "It is a superb job of reporting, and we have it at the cost of the effort, grief, and risk involved in observing from beginning to end the process of the industrial destruction of a mountain and the ruin of its watersheds. No other reporter has had the perseverance and the guts to do a respectable fraction of what Mr. Reece has done."

Reece, who grew up in Kentucky and whose father worked in the mining industry, makes it clear in *Lost Mountain* that strip mining is neither a local concern nor a radical contention, but a mainstream crisis that encompasses every hot-button issue—from corporate conflict and poisoned groundwater to irrevocable species extinction and landscape destruction. *Lost Mountain* aims to shape the national debate about what Reece considers to be one of the most serious and devastating environmental crises facing our nation.

Reece was inspired to write about strip mining and the Appalachian environment after serving as co-director of the Summer Environmental Writing Program at the UK-owned, 10,000-acre E.O. Robinson Forest in southeastern Kentucky.

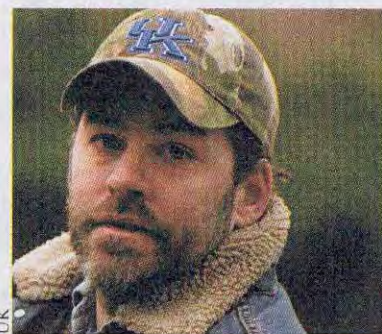
"Being in Robinson Forest and seeing it surrounded by devastation made me realize I couldn't just write about the beauty of the forest without writing about what is threatening it," Reece said.

Since 2003, Reece has taken a group of 10-15 UK students to Robinson Forest for a four-week experiential writing class. Students write essays, poetry and journal entries while hiking, canoeing and exploring the

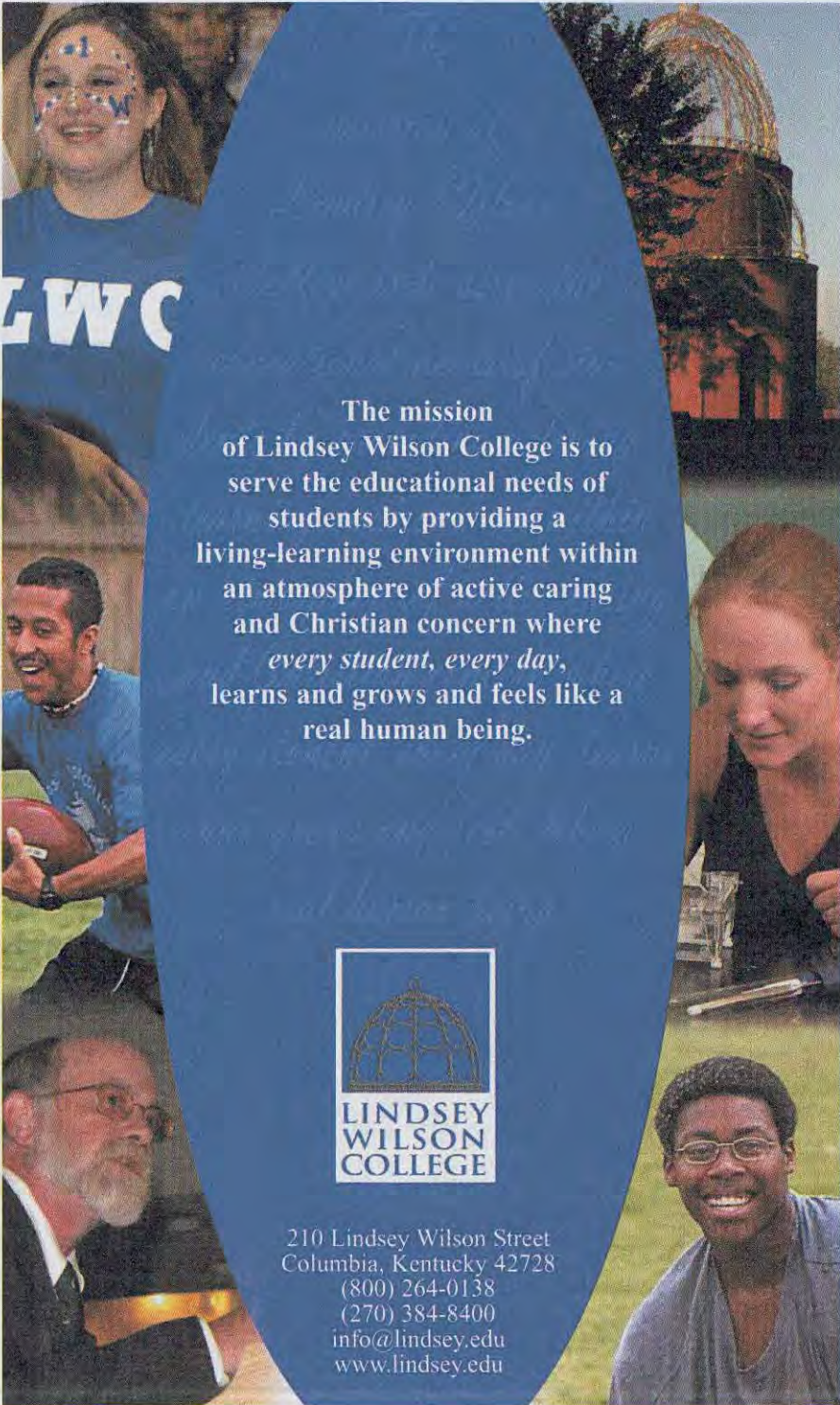
wilderness. The students also go on field trips to surrounding Appalachian communities, where they see first-hand the results of strip mining.

Prominent regional writers, such as Berry, Bobbie Ann Mason, Gurney Norman and David Orr also visit the forest to take part in the program.

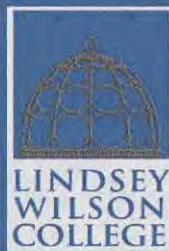
Reece has taught writing courses at UK since 1999. His main focus at UK is non-fiction writing, including nature, travel and personal essay.



UK
Erik Reece



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